



FIRST THINGS FIRST
The right system for bright futures

BABY BORROWERS: TV REALITY SHOW HAS GOOD INTENTIONS BUT AT THE EXPENSE OF YOUNG CHILDREN

This summer, on NBC stations throughout the country, (including KPNX-TV/Channel 12) the program, BABY BORROWERS has tried to help teenagers get a dose of reality when it comes to raising children. The premise...five teenage couples set up a home, get a job, and become "pretend parents." The babies/toddlers they are given are separated from their real parents and caregivers for three and a half days and given to complete strangers. The producers of BABY BORROWERS have a nanny onsite, but the actual parents can watch their children on television monitors in a different location. Some people may think that three and a half days away from a familiar setting is no big deal, but the latest studies tell a different story.

*Alison Steier, PhD, Director of the **Harris Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Training Institute**, operated by **Southwest Human Development** in Phoenix says the show is promoted as an "intriguing new social experiment." But, Dr. Steier goes on to say, "using the language of science does not by itself constitute science, and in this "experiment," the risks that decades of solid science tell us are posed to very young children by sudden and prolonged separation from their primary caregivers are sadly overlooked"*

"First, not all separations are equal. Infant-parent separations that include opportunities for babies to gradually adjust to new capable caregivers and new surroundings are qualitatively different from those that involve the sudden and protracted absence of an attachment figure. Babies and toddlers in this latter condition experience inordinate stress. There is a substantial body of research documenting grief reactions in these young children such as angry protest, inconsolable crying, persistent seeking of the lost parent, clinginess, loss of appetite, vomiting, sleep problems, and developmental regression. And if the parent returns, the baby may show anger, rejection, or ambivalent bids for and retreats from the parent that persists for weeks or months or longer."

*Early care and education experts at **First Things First**, (a voter approved statewide program whose primary vision is to insure that all Arizona children from 0 to 5 succeed in school and life) agrees that this TV program exploits young children with potential harmful circumstances. In fact, **Zero to Three**, a national organization which supports the healthy development of infant and toddlers is on board with the concern of the experts in Arizona.*

"A robust body of early childhood development and brain research clearly confirms the critical nature of early development. It is a time when young children form attachments with parents and caregivers, develop security and sense of self, and learn what to expect from the world around them. Legitimate social experiments are not conducted on national TV or on a reality show."

Early childhood experts agree that the producers of BABY BORROWERS were trying to do the right thing by showing teens the responsibilities involved in parenting young children. But, it was a misguided idea once vulnerable children were put at risk at a time when they most need protection.

According to Dr. Alison Steier, "Baby Borrowers is an example of a failure to hold in mind and honor the perspective of very young children. It contrives an experience that takes advantage of the "Achilles' heels" of early childhood-separation and stranger anxieties –for the purpose of entertainment and in this respect is profoundly developmentally disrespectful."

Media contact: Mary Jo West
Communications Director/First Things First
602-481-0441`mjwest@azftf.gov